

ACES 2014 Town Hall Report: Leveraging Partnerships to Enhance Preparedness and Resilience for Climate Change and Ecosystem Services

Partnerships can be essential to climate change preparedness and to managing ecosystem services. Partnerships that address ecosystem services are often well-positioned to include a stronger climate link, and vice-versa. Given resource constraints, it is important to leverage existing partnerships, create additional links across these partnerships, and identify gaps where new capabilities are needed to inform decisions and actions on-the-ground. This town hall provided a forum to discuss the challenges and opportunities for partnerships at the intersection of climate change and ecosystem services. There were approximately 20 town hall participants, from federal agencies, tribes, academia, NGOs, and the private sector.

The discussion identified key aspects for successful partnerships that include a focus on ecosystem services:

- Encouraging diverse perspectives and contributions;
- Accounting for socio-cultural contexts and listening for local solutions;
- Knowledge sharing; and
- Flexibility to keep partnerships viable and useful in the long term.

Panelists

The town hall began with panelists representing international, national, regional, local, and tribal partnerships:

The first speaker, Dennis Ojima, is professor at Colorado State University and Acting Director of the U.S. hub for [Future Earth](#). Future Earth, which began in 2014, is a 10-year international research initiative to develop the knowledge for responding effectively to the risks and opportunities of global environmental change and for supporting transformation towards global sustainability in the coming decades.

Emily Seyller, the second speaker, is the Inform Decisions and Adaptation Science Program lead at the [U.S. Global Change Research Program](#). Seyller spoke about the Adaptation and Mitigation Nexus (AMNex) Affinity Group. [AMNex](#) is an affinity group of NCAnet, a network of organizations working with the NCA to engage producers and users of assessment information. AMNex brings together people from diverse industries to discuss research, guidance and implementation of integrative adaptation and mitigation practices. Participants seek to better understand and support decisions on the ground.

The third speaker, Adrienne Antoine, is a Program Manager with the NOAA Climate Program Office. Antoine spoke about NOAA's [Regional Integrated Sciences Assessments](#) (RISA) Program. The eleven RISA teams help expand and build the nation's capacity to prepare for and adapt to climate variability and change. Central to the RISA approach are commitments to

process, partnership, and trust building with public and private user communities. University-based RISA teams work directly with stakeholders. A recent example of how RISA teams convene stakeholders is an October, 2014 workshop of the [Consortium for Climate Risk in the Urban Northeast](#), which addressed research gaps and barriers for ecosystems and climate adaptation.

Amanda Campbell, the fourth speaker, is an Environmental Planner with the [Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments](#) (MWCOG). MWCOG partnered with several Federal agencies on a pilot initiative, [Building a Climate Resilient National Capital Region](#). The pilot evaluates risks and vulnerabilities to agency missions and devises a plan to manage climate impacts. Recommendations that emerged from the pilot are being integrated into partners' environmental plans. Governance and funding are big issues for the future of the partnership. Campbell noted the importance of having a stronger ecosystem services constituency.

Sue Wotkyns, the fifth speaker, is the [Climate Change Program](#) Manager for Northern Arizona University's Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals. The national program serves tribes through "outstanding, culturally-relevant education and training that increase environmental capacity and strengthen sovereignty". Wotkyns noted the importance of spending the time to build relationships with tribes.

Following the initial panel, town hall participants identified challenges that partnerships often face, and principles for successful partnerships.

Challenges for partnerships

Partnerships often seek to bring together diverse sets of people, which can make it challenging to find agreement on common priorities. Partners may all agree on the big picture, but may have divergent visions for how to achieve that end.

Partners may have different expectations about resource and personnel commitments, or may expect other partners to provide resources.

A few people with extreme opinions can dominate group discussions. "You need to know how to get over the loud extremes and how to demonstrate the majority's consensus." One-on-one meetings can help to get input from all stakeholders. Conflict management is also important.

It is challenging to track the many sources of information about what is going on. "We need to create good, interoperable databases across initiatives to find projects and potential partners."

After the goal that initially motivated the partnership has been met, or after a funding source has ended, it can be challenging to continue. It is okay for a partnership to end. However, if the partnership has been successful, then partners may identify new goals. There is value in keeping

in touch with partners during less active periods, even if some partners are not always fully engaged.

Indigenous peoples are unique partners that have special considerations. Federally recognized tribes in the United States are sovereign nations and should be approached as such. It is important to understand that these communities have unique governance processes that are fundamental to decision-making.

Principles for successful partnerships

Start partnerships on an informal basis, to enable initial focus on identifying common goals. Formalizing a partnership, for example through a Memorandum of Understanding, can be a distraction if attempted immediately. A partnership can be formalized later if necessary.

Recognize that partners bring different capabilities and perspectives. It is important to listen to these different viewpoints and maintain flexibility in how partners contribute and how partnerships evolve.

Be fair, open, and transparent to create legitimacy. Surveys can be one way to invite input from all partners and understand their cultural landscape. To help build trust, hold public meetings, and provide accessible meeting notes.

Partners benefit from information sharing, from knowing each other's interests and funding opportunities. "It is very valuable to know what everyone is doing and potential resources to tap into."

Creatively consider how a partnership can be maintained over the long-term by harnessing partners' diverse resources and seeking support from outside sources.

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